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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine the usefulness of the learning women acquire through life experience to entry level jobs in selected occupations. Methodology included sending sixteen sets of nine questionnaires to women in women's centers displaced homemaker centers, and counseling centers in seven states (131 replies, 91 percent response). The questionnaires were designed to determine the frequency and extent of involvement of adult women in homemaking and parenting activities, volunteer work and community service, recreation and hobbies, formal and nonformal education, and paid work. The questionnaires also asked about respondent characteristics and requested self-ratings of competency in twenty-eight skills. Questionnaires designed to identify the importance of certain skills in selecting workers for entry-level jobs in eleven occupations were sent to nine employers in each occupation. Then the self-ratings of adult women's skills were compared with employer selection ratings. (Results are shown in nine tables of skills rated necessary for each occupation and a table showing transferability of the women's self-rated skills to the skills the employers selected.) (KC)

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IDENTIFYING THE TRANSFERABILITY OF
WOMEN'S LIFE EXPERIENCE LEARNING TO EMPLOYMENT

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Project Report, Task A5, Analysis of the
Transferability of Women's Competencies to Employment

Credentialing Women's Life Experiences
(Project ACCESS)

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Identifying the Transferability of
Life Experience Learning to Employment

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Adult women wishing to return to paid employment after a period of time in non-market work, such as homemaking, encounter a variety of problems. These problems include, in addition to the age and sex stereotypes prevalent in our society, the belief that the unpaid work done by women in the home and the community is trivial, involves little significant learning, and has no transferability to paid employment.

There has been acknowledgement (U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1974) that the failure of employers to recognize the skills that are learned through volunteer work, community service, and other unpaid work experience is an artificial barrier to the employment of women and minorities and that this barrier should be removed. Giele (1978) pointed out that careers are constructed on experiences both in and out of the paid labor force and, "Consequently, the credentialing of all productive activities becomes increasingly important."

Because much of women's life experience learning does not take place under the sponsorship and supervision of faculty or employers, there are special problems associated with transferring this learning to paid employment. These have been summarized by Ekstrom and Eliason (1978). Adult women are unable to transfer their life experience learning to paid employment because of four types of problems: (1) Identification--the woman herself, or the employer, may not recognize that an activity has

been a learning experience in which new skills and knowledge were acquired; (2) Articulation--women and employers may not be able to recognize or demonstrate the relationship between a skill acquired through experiential learning and a job; (3) Assessment--even when employers agree that life experience learning has resulted in job-relevant skills, formal recognition of these skills may not occur because of problems in assessing and credentialing life experience; and (4) Beliefs--some employers feel that acceptance of life experience learning will result in lower worker selection standards or will mean the hiring of individuals unable to perform well on the job.

There is a growing body of literature showing that adult women do acquire job-relevant skills and knowledge through their unpaid work at home and in the community.

Nickse (1975) identified ten competency areas involved in homemaking; employers' ratings of the job-relevance of these competencies indicated that all ten were considered essential or highly desirable for human service workers. Arvey and Begalla (1975) used the Position Analysis Questionnaire (PAQ) to compare homemaking with the profiles for other occupations; the most similar occupation was patrolman. Muller (1975) found that adult women used their unpaid work as a way of maintaining the skills they had acquired through education and paid work, and to aid in future job searches. Identification of the skills acquired through experiential learning has been used by Northeastern University's Women's Career Program to facilitate the entrance of women into nontraditional jobs (Rich, 1977). Hybels (1979) found that 44% of the women in public relations work said that they had

developed their job skills totally or in part through volunteer work experience. Comparable figures for other occupations were: management, 39%; counseling, 28%; teaching, 25%; bookkeeping, 23%; clerical work, 22%; and research and writing, 20%.

Method

In the fall of 1978, the Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education of the U.S. Office of Education funded a research project to further the recognition of women's life experience learning. One purpose of the study was to obtain an indication of the transferability of skills acquired through life experience learning to entry-level jobs in selected occupations.

As part of this research, a questionnaire was developed to determine the frequency and extent of involvement of adult women in homemaking and parenting activities, volunteer work and community service, recreation and hobbies, formal and nonformal education, and paid work. Information about respondent characteristics was also sought, as were self-ratings of competency in 28 skills. The occupationally-transferable skills that comprised the self-rating section included those most frequently listed in the Dictionary of occupational titles qualification profiles of worker trait groups (as adapted from Table 5 of Sjogren, 1977). Alternate forms of the questionnaire were prepared so that the same set of items would not be administered to more than nine women.

Sixteen sets of nine questionnaires were mailed to women's centers, displaced homemaker centers, and counseling centers in seven states, and were completed by women who were taking part in the programs of these

centers. A total of 131 usable replies were received, a response rate of 91%. These findings are described in Ekstrom, Beier, Davis, and Gruenberg (in press).

Employer questionnaires, to identify the importance of certain skills in selecting workers for entry-level jobs, were then prepared for each of eleven occupations: airline reservation agent, bank clerk/teller, claims adjuster, credit/collection worker, electronics assembler, floral designer, home health aide, insurance sales agent, personnel worker, photo laboratory technician, and social service aide. The questionnaires were based on occupational descriptions and on interviews with two different employers in each of two cities, to minimize local variations in occupations.

The employer questionnaires listed the skills, personal characteristics, and experiences required for the occupations listed above. The employers were asked to rate each item, using a method adapted from Primoff's job element technique (Primoff, 1975), for selecting new employees, using the scale 3 = found only in superior employees, 2 = necessary for average job performance, 1 = minimum necessary for job, and 0 = not relevant. These questionnaires were sent to nine employers in each of the selected occupations. Average ratings for each item were computed.

Tables 1 through 9 show the items with the highest selection ratings for the occupations of airline reservation agent, bank clerk/teller, claims adjuster, credit/collection worker, electronics assembler, floral designer, home health aide, insurance sales agent, and photo lab technician.

(Mean ratings of 1.5 or higher indicate that the skill is used in selecting employees who are expected to give average or superior job performance.) There were insufficient personnel worker and social service aide responses for meaningful analysis.

The self-ratings of adult women's skills (from Task A4) were then compared with the employer selection ratings. Note that not all skills were relevant or asked about for all jobs. The results are shown in Table 10. The skills are listed in order of their weighted average self-ratings by women (scale: 3 = I do this very well, 2 = I do this well, 1 = I do not do this well, 0 = I cannot do this). Employers' mean job selection ratings for each skill are shown where available.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that self-ratings of adult women's life experience skills have potential for use as selection indices for the Project ACCESS occupations. The purpose of the field test (Task B1) is to demonstrate that these self-ratings have practical utility, as well.

Additional analyses of the occupational transferability of women's life experience learning will be done using the data from the field test.

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Table 1

Airline Reservations: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Use communications skills to persuade others	2.3
2. Learn new information quickly	2.1
3. Direct, control, and plan the activities of others	2.0
4. Use listening skills	2.0
5. Do arithmetic computations	1.8
6. Deal effectively with customers	1.8
7. Use problem-solving and decision-making skills	1.8
8. Plan travel	1.8
9. Set priorities	1.6
10. Work under pressure	1.6
11. Follow orders and accept supervision	1.6
12. Establish rapport with individuals of diverse backgrounds	1.6
13. Sell a product or service	1.6
14. Solicit and make constructive use of negative and positive feedback	1.6
15. Manage effectively in a high pressure situation	1.6
16. Meet accountability demands of others	1.6
17. Arrange group trips	1.6
18. Demonstrate good oral communications skills	1.6
19. Manage time and schedule activities	1.5
20. Refer people to sources of information and assistance	1.5
21. Adjust to a variety of activities and to unexpected changes	1.5
22. Convey information by telephone	1.5
23. Use questioning skills	1.5

Table 2

Bank Teller: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Learn details of new services and procedures quickly	2.8
2. Greet and serve large numbers of people while maintaining a pleasant, alert manner	2.7
3. Deal effectively with customers	2.7
4. Think and behave rationally when dealing with an emergency	2.6
5. Demonstrate respect for and willingness to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of customer records and transactions	2.5
6. Be punctual and have careful work habits	2.5
7. Make change quickly and accurately	2.4
8. Handle unpleasant confrontations cheerfully	2.4
9. Follow orders and accept supervision	2.4
10. Demonstrate sensitivity to and awareness of community attitudes and concerns	2.3
11. Establish and maintain neat, accurate, detailed financial records	2.2
12. Interpret an organization and its system for delivery of services to the public	2.2
13. Work as a cashier	2.2
14. Remember details	2.2
15. Use business forms	2.1
16. Follow moderately complex procedures precisely	2.0
17. Demonstrate understanding of simple checking and savings accounts	1.9
18. Establish rapport with individuals of diverse backgrounds	1.9
19. Use an adding machine	1.9
20. Do arithmetic computations quickly	1.8
21. Do bookkeeping or accounting	1.8
22. Do customer relations work	1.8
23. Explain and interpret bank policies and services	1.6
24. Work under pressure	1.6
25. Work steadily at repetitive tasks	1.6

Table 2 (continued)

	<u>Mean rating</u>
26. Take responsibility	1.6
27. Do retail sales	1.6
28. Enjoy working with numbers	1.6
29. Be conscientious	1.6

Table 3

Claims Adjuster: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Present arguments and evidence to support a position	3.0
2. Translate information and facts to a level appropriate to an individual's background and experience	3.0
3. Determine the urgency of a problem and handle it appropriately	3.0
4. Conduct negotiations with an awareness that compromise may be necessary	3.0
5. Establish priorities when dealing with an emergency	3.0
6. Use problem-solving and decision-making skills	3.0
7. Select data to document a statement	3.0
8. Develop a plan to investigate a problem	3.0
9. Define and delimit the basic issues of a problem	3.0
10. Gather information by conducting interviews	3.0
11. Make inferences from data	3.0
12. Prepare reports containing data and documentary evidence	3.0
13. Deal assertively with professionals in several fields	3.0
14. Elicit and convey information over the phone	3.0
15. Do telephone solicitation work	3.0
16. Set priorities	2.5
17. Identify problems and difficulties	2.5
18. Respect the confidentiality of records and personal information	2.5
19. Read insurance policies, contracts, legal agreements, etc., with understanding	2.5
20. Conduct a search of legal documents to obtain information	2.5
21. Use contacts constructively when dealing with a problem	2.5
22. Build good working relationships with others	2.5
23. Use reference resources	2.5
24. Do accurate detailed work	2.5
25. Do repetitive work following a set procedure	2.5
26. Perform work under stressful conditions	2.5

Table 3 (continued)

	<u>Mean rating</u>
27. "Think on your feet"	2.5
28. Learn complex information	2.5
29. Manage time	2.0
30. Develop and maintain current files	2.0
31. Keep records and prepare reports	2.0
32. Obtain and verify routine factual information	2.0
33. Establish rapport with individuals of diverse backgrounds	2.0
34. Select the legal services and processes appropriate for a problem	2.0
35. Coordinate simultaneous projects or activities	2.0
36. Organize a project into its component parts and determine the sequence in which these should be performed	2.0
37. Identify the individuals and groups concerned with a problem	2.0
38. Identify individuals and groups who can help with a problem	2.0
39. Adjust schedule to a variety of activities and unexpected changes	2.0
40. Do arithmetic computations	2.0
41. Instruct others	2.0
42. Read or scan forms with understanding	2.0
43. Have office work experience	2.0
44. Make an oral presentation	1.5
45. Establish rapport with persons seeking advice	1.5
46. Deal with interpersonal problems	1.5
47. Prevent or limit conflict between individuals	1.5
48. Identify the needs of a person in a crisis situation	1.5
49. Provide advice and informal counseling	1.5
50. Make field investigations and prepare related reports	1.5
51. Influence others	1.5
52. Interpret the feelings, ideas, and opinions of others	1.5
53. Obtain information from people under stress	1.5

Table 4

Collections: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Read, write, and speak English fluently	2.4
2. Be self-motivated, self-starting	2.4
3. Be competitive, strive to better performance	2.4
4. Work under close supervision	2.0
5. Remain calm, firm, and business-like during confrontations with hostile persons	2.0
6. Encourage the development of "common sense"	1.8
7. Negotiate between people	1.6
8. Maintain a personal detachment from work	1.5
9. Deal with other people	1.5
10. Influence other people	1.5
11. Perform work under stressful conditions	1.5
12. Analyze a problem	1.5

Table 5

Electronics Assembler: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Demonstrate manual dexterity	3.0
2. Work steadily at highly repetitive manual tasks	3.0
3. Differentiate between components	3.0
4. Attend to detail	3.0
5. Do precise and accurate detailed work	3.0
6. Meet accountability demands of others	3.0
7. Observe safety precautions when using tools, equipment, and machines	3.0
8. Be reliable and punctual	3.0
9. Be willing to continue learning new techniques	3.0
10. Work with hand tools	2.5
11. Read blueprint schematics	2.0
12. Wire circuit boards	1.5
13. Use a soldering iron	1.5
14. Demonstrate an interest in how things work	1.5
15. Do arithmetic computations	1.5
16. Do electrical wiring or small appliance repair	1.5
17. Establish work flow procedures	1.5

Table 6

Floral Designer: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Follow directions and accept supervision	3.0
2. Work under pressure	3.0
3. Stand on feet for many hours	3.0
4. Use scissors, knives, and wire cutters	2.5
5. Work quickly and steadily at repetitive tasks	2.5
6. Deal with people	2.5
7. Use artistic sense	2.5
8. Use creativity	2.5
9. Demonstrate fine manual dexterity	2.0
10. Demonstrate knowledge and skills related to planting and transplanting	2.0
11. Demonstrate knowledge of plant maintenance	2.0
12. Be outgoing and gregarious	2.0
13. Apply principles of color, texture, and design in floral arranging	1.5
14. Identify aesthetic guidelines for evaluating and planning floral arrangements	1.5
15. Visualize completed arrangements	1.5
16. Demonstrate knowledge of plant names	1.5
17. Interact pleasantly with customers	1.5
18. Persuade customers to accept a substitute when flowers desired are unavailable	1.5
19. Show customers arrangements that can be bought for a given price	1.5
20. Assist customers in selecting flowers or floral arrangements	1.5
21. Hand letter attractively	1.5
22. Supervise others	1.5
23. Care for house plants	1.5
24. Have experience in flower arranging	1.5

Table 7

Home Health Aide: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Be flexible	2.2
2. Make observational records of patients	2.1
3. Perform work under stressful conditions	2.0
4. Be self-directed	2.0
5. Think and behave rationally in an emergency	2.0
6. Show tolerance for the varied life-styles of people	2.0
7. Follow orders and accept supervision	1.9
8. Show compassion for those with problems	1.9
9. Show willingness to ask questions, bring up problems	1.9
10. Feed a patient	1.8
11. Prepare and store food to conserve nutrients	1.8
12. Maintain clean and hazard-free living quarters for patient/family	1.8
13. Provide standard first aid	1.8
14. Make oral reports about patients	1.8
15. Help patients develop ways of coping with the demands of daily life	1.8
16. Respect patient/family need for confidentiality and privacy	1.8
17. Provide for the physical and emotional needs of a patient/family	1.8
18. Establish rapport with individuals of diverse backgrounds	1.8
19. Encourage the development of "common sense"	1.8
20. Interpret other's feelings, ideas, and opinions	1.8
21. Negotiate between two or more people	1.8
22. Supervise others	1.8
23. Observe special diet rules	1.8
24. Recognize and deal with medical emergencies	1.8
25. Maintain hygienic conditions for a patient	1.8
26. Encourage and aid in the development of patient self-sufficiency	1.8
27. Observe patient for unusual signs or symptoms	1.7

Table 7 (continued)

	<u>Mean rating</u>
28. Refer others to sources of information and assistance	1.7
29. Adjust schedule to a variety of activities and to unexpected changes	1.7
30. Instruct others	1.7
31. Evaluate the cost and nutritional value of alternative methods of preparing the same food	1.7
32. Recognize the nonverbal cues and behaviors that indicate tensions or problems	1.7
33. Have experience in homemaking	1.7
34. Have good health	1.7
35. Be punctual	1.7
36. Be dependable	1.7
37. See that patient gets proper rest	1.6
38. Recognize the common side-effects of medicine	1.6
39. Evaluate and adapt a home in relation to a patient's disability	1.6
40. Assist patients in the use of special equipment	1.6
41. Encourage patients to develop social skills	1.6
42. Work with and supervise children	1.6
43. Work with the elderly	1.6
44. Direct, control, and plan the activities of others	1.6
45. Identify and use community resources that can enrich the life of the ill, handicapped, or elderly	1.6
46. Evaluate the quality of purchases	1.6
47. Serve attractive and palatable meals	1.6
48. Prepare meals or adapt recipes to meet special diet needs	1.6
49. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the basic rules of nutrition	1.6
50. Detect potential health and safety hazards	1.6
51. Document patient progress	1.6
52. Have experience in caring for ill, handicapped, or elderly	1.6

Table 7 (continued)

	<u>Mean rating</u>
53. Keep patient clean	1.5
54. Baby-proof a house	1.5
55. Demonstrate an understanding of and rapport with children	1.5
56. Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to community attitudes and concerns	1.5

Table 8

Insurance Sales: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Demonstrate a desire for advancement, achievement, success	2.8
2. Influence others	2.6
3. Make an effective oral presentation	2.5
4. Deal with rejection	2.5
5. Work independently	2.5
6. Be self-directed	2.5
7. Establish rapport with individuals of diverse backgrounds	2.5
8. Interpret the feelings, ideas, and opinions of others	2.4
9. Use contacts constructively	2.4
10. Identify target groups/audiences	2.3
11. Present arguments and evidence to support a position	2.3
12. Translate information and facts to a level of understanding appropriate to the audience	2.3
13. Use communications skills to persuade others	2.3
14. Deal effectively with customers	2.3
15. Motivate people	2.3
16. Manage money	2.3
17. Be a good listener	2.3
18. Be empathetic	2.3
19. Be competitive	2.3
20. Assess potential markets	2.1
21. Deal with adversity	2.1
22. Work under stressful conditions	2.0
23. Keep records and prepare reports	2.0
24. Identify communications techniques appropriate to an audience	2.0
25. Provide advice and informal counseling when necessary	2.0
26. Establish and maintain financial or sales records	2.0
27. Develop goals and plans for an activity	2.0
28. Coordinate several simultaneous projects or activities	2.0

Table 8 (continued)

	<u>Mean rating</u>
29. Deal with people non-judgmentally	2.0
30. Organize a sales program	2.0
31. Be self-confident	2.0
32. Demonstrate a strong ego	2.0
33. Obtain and verify factual information	1.9
34. Do arithmetic computations	1.8
35. Analyze a problem	1.8
36. Conduct negotiations with an awareness that compromise may be necessary	1.8
37. Maintain correspondence with customers	1.8
38. Establish and maintain procedures to monitor work quality and quantity	1.8
39. Solicit and make constructive use of positive and negative feedback	1.8
40. Keep records of individual or group progress	1.8
41. Adapt to different types of people	1.8
42. Direct sales of a product or service	1.8
43. Adjust schedule to a variety of activities and frequent changes	1.6
44. Select insurance policies and plans that best meet a family's needs	1.6
45. Instruct others	1.5
46. Identify methods of evaluating effectiveness	1.5
47. Identify the resources needed to accomplish an objective	1.5
48. Train others	1.5
49. Supervise others	1.5
50. Demonstrate familiarity with the community	1.5

Table 9

Photo Lab Technician: Items with Highest Selection Ratings

	<u>Mean rating</u>
1. Do precise and accurate detailed work	2.7
2. Evaluate a product using stated guidelines	2.4
3. Make fine color discriminations	2.3
4. Take responsibility	2.3
5. Learn to operate several different machines	2.3
6. Follow orders and accept supervision	2.2
7. Learn and apply rules	2.1
8. Follow directions	2.1
9. Be dependable	2.0
10. Demonstrate interest in mechanical processes	2.0
11. Use safety precautions when working with chemicals	1.9
12. Cooperate with coworkers	1.9
13. Work steadily at repetitive tasks following a set procedure	1.8
14. Measure and mix chemicals	1.7
15. Do simple arithmetic computations	1.7
16. Be patient	1.7
17. Demonstrate good eye-hand coordination	1.6
18. Supervise others	1.6

Table 10: Transferability Analysis

Mean Employer Selection Ratings

Ability to:	Mean self-rating by re-entry women	Airline Reservations	Bank Teller	Claims Adjuster	Collections	Electronics Assembler	Floral Designer	Home Health Aide	Insurance Sales	Photo Lab Technician
1. Take responsibility	2.6	-	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.3
2. Deal with other people	2.6	-	2.7	-	1.5	-	2.5	-	2.3	-
3. Adjust schedule to a variety of unexpected changes	2.5	1.5	-	2.0	-	-	-	1.7	1.6	-
4. Be self-directed	2.5	-	1.4	-	2.4	-	-	2.0	2.5	-
5. Analyze a problem	2.5	-	-	-	1.5	-	-	-	1.8	-
6. Interpret the feelings, ideas, and opinions of others	2.5	-	-	1.5	-	-	-	1.8	2.4	-
7. Use oral communication effectively	2.4	1.6	-	1.5	-	-	-	-	2.5	-
8. Do precise and accurate detailed work	2.3	1.4	-	2.5	-	3.0	-	-	-	2.7
9. Compile information	2.3	-	-	3.0	1.0	-	-	-	-	-
10. Do problem solving	2.3	1.8	-	3.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
11. Instruct others	2.3	-	-	2.0	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.7	1.5	1.4
12. Perform work under stress	2.2	-	1.6	2.5	1.5	-	3.0	2.0	2.0	-

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Table 10: Transferability Analysis
(continued)

Mean Employer Selection Ratings

Ability to:	Mean self-rating by re-entry women	Airline Reservations	Bank Teller	Claims Adjuster	Collections	Electronics Assembler	Floral Designer	Home Health Aide	Insurance Sales	Photo Lab Technician
13. Do a repetitive task following set procedures	2.2	1.2	1.6	2.5	-	3.0	2.5	-	-	1.8
14. Evaluate using someone else's guidelines	2.2	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-	-	2.4
15. Direct, control, and plan activities of others	2.1	2.0	-	-	-	-	-	1.6	-	-
16. Negotiate between two or more people/groups	2.1	-	-	3.0	1.6	-	-	1.8	1.8	-
17. Supervise others	2.1	-	-	-	0.8	0.0	1.5	1.8	1.5	1.6
18. Persuade others	2.1	2.3	-	-	1.0	-	1.5	-	2.3	-
19. Influence others	1.9	-	-	1.5	1.5	-	-	1.4	2.6	-
20. Sell a product/service	1.7	1.6	-	-	-	-	1.0	-	0.8	-
21. Do computations/arithmetic	1.7	1.8	1.8	2.0	-	1.5	-	-	1.8	1.7
22. Do fund raising	1.3	-	-	-	0.4	-	-	-	0.4	-